

Naturopathic Doctors Must Speak Out Against Human Rights Atrocities in Palestine



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At the time the first draft of this article was written, people living in the Gaza Strip were dropping dead in the street from a man-made famine,¹ and from direct attacks while trying to seek limited food, mostly by the Israeli military.² There was plenty of aid available, but it was being withheld by the state of Israel which has held Gaza under siege since 2007,³ a situation that has intensified since October 2023. Even since the most recent so-called ceasefire agreement of October 10, 2025, military action against Palestinians has continued, aid is restricted, and people continue to die. These deaths are not “costs of war,” or “collateral damage.” These are crimes inflicted by Israel against the people of Palestine, deliberate acts of genocide as determined by nearly all the major human rights organizations in the world, including the United Nations.^{4,5,6,7} Most Canadian naturopathic practitioners and institutions have been silent, despite the clear moral obligation outlined in our oath to witness and take action. We invite our colleagues to reflect on their ethical and professional obligations as naturopathic doctors, and take action in relation to this genocide, as well as other global conflicts occurring now and in the future.

Some people argue that medical spaces are or should be apolitical. However, medicine is *inherently* political. Every health outcome is embedded in a complex network of power, economics, culture, and governance. In July 2025, The Palestinian Centre for Human Rights warned that the healthcare system in the Gaza Strip had reached a stage of near total collapse in which individuals requiring care for chronic conditions faced a slow, painful death.⁸ There was a dramatic spike in otherwise preventable infections, most notably meningitis in children, due to overcrowding, malnutrition, contaminated water, denial of access to antibiotics, and the collapse of the healthcare system⁹—all occurring on the background of overt state violence, starvation, and psychological torture^{10,11} and inaction by major global powers.^{12,13} Medicine is not practiced in a vacuum.

Many feel the horror of what they see livestreamed on their phones but feel helpless to do anything that will make a difference.

Or may be afraid to speak up because others have been punished for doing so, due to the coordinated conflation of criticism of Israel with antisemitism. Unfortunately, continued silence only serves to reinforce others’ fear. Speaking up encourages others to do the same.

While doctors may not be able to halt genocide, treat famine, or stop bombs directly, medical professionals have cited ethical obligations in open letters and position statements calling for ceasefire and an arms embargo.^{15,16,17,18,19} As naturopathic doctors in Canada, we are guided by our oath and principles, which clearly outline an ethical obligation to advocate for an arms embargo and sanctions on Israel, and immediate and adequate humanitarian aid to Palestinians.

“Through precept, lecture, and example, I will assist and encourage others to strengthen their health, reduce risks for disease, and preserve the health of our planet for ourselves, our families, and future generations.”

As naturopathic doctors, we know that the primary causes of suffering in this world are due to social and ecological determinants of health.²⁰ Palestinians have no access to optimal determinants of health, other than pure *sumud* (صمود, steadfastness). Overt violence, destruction of land and poisoning of water; denial of free access to food, water and shelter; decimation of the healthcare and education systems: these are the epitome of dis-ease.

Militarization itself is one of the most significant contributors to ecological destruction, and subsequent poor health.²¹ Armed violence destroys not only human lives, but also agricultural land, water, and air, making places unlivable. Government officials in Israel have clearly stated this intention with respect to Palestine.²² These harms spill across borders. One study calculated that the projected emissions from 15 months of direct military activities in Palestine were greater than the combined annual emissions of 36 individual countries and territories.²³

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“I dedicate myself to the service of humanity as a practitioner of the art and science of Naturopathic medicine.”

We are in service to all of humanity. Not just those who look like us, or pray like us, or live in the same ways as us. This is the basis of anti-oppressive practice. The state of Israel and the supporters of its actions towards Palestinians have manufactured consent for genocide in part through a campaign of dehumanization.^{24,25} The Arab Canadian Lawyers Association has identified several mechanisms of anti-Palestinian racism, ranging from marginalization of Palestinians and their allies from professional or personal spaces, to denial of the existence of Palestine or Palestinians, to outright justification of violence.²⁶ Countering these tactics is critical to de-normalize the erasure of Palestinians.

Countering anti-Jewish hate is also imperative. The horrific irony is that the coordinated weaponization of accusations of antisemitism as a tactic of silencing harms Jewish people by perpetuating the narrative that Israel’s actions are done in their name, and are necessary for their safety. It is critically important that we clearly distinguish between a hatred of, or prejudice towards, people who are Jewish, and a sound criticism of state-sponsored violence, starvation, and displacement, and failure to ensure the human rights of the population residing in a territory that it occupies.^{27,28}

“I will conduct my life and the practice of naturopathic health care with vigilance, integrity, and freedom from prejudice. I will abstain from voluntary acts of injustice and corruption.”

As human rights activist Desmond Tutu is famously said to have stated, “If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor.” Silence emboldens those with power to continue wielding it with impunity in order to uphold harmful policies. The government of Canada has yet to follow through on its calls for Israel to lift restrictions on the flow of aid and to uphold international humanitarian law,²⁹ enabling the ongoing murder of Palestinians. Political neutrality empowers police forces to violently arrest peaceful demonstrators who call for the end to this genocide.^{30,31} Personal and institutional silence emboldens those who harass, report, doxx, and threaten those who act with integrity and freedom from prejudice.

Truth-telling and working towards the dismantling of oppression are not unique to the Palestinian struggle. We, who are settlers and descendants of settlers on Turtle Island, must draw parallels with the ongoing genocide against Indigenous Peoples here, and our collective responsibility towards reconciliation.³² This struggle is interwoven with the struggle against Islamophobia, anti-Black racism, and anti-imperial movements around the globe.

“I will endeavour to continually improve my abilities as a healer through study, reflection, and genuine concern for humanity. I will impart knowledge of the advanced healing arts to dedicated colleagues and students.”

Throughout these past 29 months, the refrain of, “it’s complicated,” has rung loudly. Indeed, it is. The collective and intertwined trauma

and pain of the history of the land in which all Abrahamic religions are rooted is deep. However, we cannot stay silent simply because we feel we don’t know enough. The claim of “complication” is a deliberate mechanism of silencing that is used to intimidate and sustain consent for genocide. The conclusion of the International Court of Justice in early 2024 that genocide was even “plausible” should have been enough to demand action to prevent further loss of life.

CONCLUSION

Our ethical code as naturopathic doctors compels us to act to promote good health for all of humanity, and the planet we call home. We must commit to lifelong learning—about history, about genocide, about mechanisms of oppression, and about the difference between existential safety and discomfort. We must draw from our principles and use our collective voice and leverage as doctors, alumni and professional members to demand justice. Naturopathic doctors are trained to think critically. Our institutions have a long history of challenging mainstream narratives and critiquing dominant rhetoric. We can and *must* do that with respect to genocide as well. We call on our naturopathic colleagues to take action (please see Appendix 1 for ways to take action towards justice).

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APPENDIX 1: WAYS TO TAKE ACTION TOWARDS JUSTICE

Taking action does not have to be big or flashy. There are many ways, both private and visible, to influence oneself, one's communities, and the systems in which we all live. Here are some considerations, with sample resources to get you started:

Commit to educating yourself on history, current sociopolitical realities, and the ways in which these inform health and the practice of health care.

- Zinn Education Project. Teaching about Palestine-Israel and the unfolding genocide in Gaza. <https://www.zinnedproject.org/news/teaching-palestine-israel/>
- Persad S, Xu C. The social determinants of health and genocide: towards a public health integrated framework of genocide and mass violence. *GSP* 2023;17(2):1-21. <https://doi.org/10.5038/1911-9933.17.2.1938>.
- The Guardian. Five of the best books to understand the Israel-Palestine conflict. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2024/feb/29/five-of-the-best-books-to-understand-the-israel-palestine-conflict>

Engage in honest personal reflection, including on your own positionality (biases, position of privilege), and reasons for engagement or disengagement from Palestine or other forms of oppression/injustice.

- Amnesty International Book Club. One Day, Everyone Will Have Always Been Against This – Discussion Guide. <https://amnesty.ca/bookclub-news/one-day-omar-el-akkad-discussion-guide/>

Listen for and challenge accuracy and bias of language in conversations and reporting about Palestine and Israel.

- The Conversation. Bias hiding in plain sight: Decades of analyses suggest US media skews anti-Palestinian. <https://theconversation.com/bias-hiding-in-plain-sight-decades-of-analyses-suggest-us-media-skews-anti-palestinian-216967>
- Canadians for Justice and Peace in the Middle East. Media Accountability Project. <https://www.cjpmemap.ca/>

Advocate that governmental bodies and professional associations acknowledge and condemn the genocide in Palestine and elsewhere, and act to ensure necessary action to bring justice to those affected.

- Doctors Without Borders. Palestine: Ceasefire not the end of the extreme suffering in Gaza. <https://www.doctorswithoutborders.ca/palestine-ceasefire-not-the-end-of-extreme-suffering-in-gaza/>
- European Public Health Alliance. Joint Public Health Statement on Gaza. <https://epha.org/joint-public-health-statement-on-gaza/>

Seek community among others who are advocating for the well-being of Palestinians, and justice in the region.

- Doctors Against Genocide
- Health workers Alliance for Palestine

Leverage your public platforms to educate your followers on the links between genocide and health, and amplify the voices of those on the ground. Be aware of systemic censorship within social media related to this topic.

- Modern Diplomacy. Social Media's Key Role in Palestinian Activism for Gaza. <https://moderndiplomacy.eu/2024/10/25/social-medias-key-role-in-palestinian-activism-for-gaza/>
- Human Rights Watch. Meta's Broken Promises: Systemic Censorship of Palestine Content on Instagram and Facebook. <https://www.hrw.org/report/2023/12/21/metas-broken-promises/systemic-censorship-palestine-content-instagram-and>

Consider non-violent direct actions that you can take to withhold support for genocide.

- World Beyond War. Divest from Genocide: Break Up With Your Bank! <https://worldbeyondwar.org/breakupwithyourbank/>
- BDS Movement

For more thoughts on taking action as healthcare providers, we direct readers to the excellent article: Zafran H, Beagan BL, Shephard D, et al. Shattering silence, inviting dialogue: anti-oppressive occupational therapy during the genocide of Palestinians. *Can J Occup Ther*. 2025;0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/00084174251356348>